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LETTER DATED 20 MAY 1998 FROM THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES A.I. OF THE PERMANENT MISSION OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to attach, once again, a statement by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea concerning the sudden border disputes between the State of Eritrea and the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, issued today, 20 May 1998, in Asmara.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the text of the present letter, its annex and the enclosure to the States Members of the United Nations as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Tesfa Alem SEYOUM
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

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Annex

Statement by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea, issued on 20 May 1998

The Cabinet of Ministers of the Government of Eritrea held a meeting today, Wednesday, 20 May 1998, to review the developments that have unfolded in the past few days in the current crisis between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and issued the following statement.

1. The Cabinet of Ministers examined in depth the main source and root cause of the crisis between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In this regard, the Cabinet of Ministers identified the Eritrean territories that lie within the internationally recognized boundary of Eritrea but that have now been incorporated into the Tigray Administrative Zone according to an official map issued by the Ethiopian Mapping Authority in 1997 (see enclosure). The map carves out large swaths of Eritrean territory in the south-western (Badme area), southern (Tsorona and Alitena areas) and eastern parts (Bada) of the country.

The Cabinet further examined areas in south-eastern Eritrea contiguous with the Afar Administrative Zone that have been occupied by Ethiopian troops in the past year.

The Cabinet reasserted that these facts demonstrate Ethiopia's violation of the internationally recognized boundaries of Eritrea in contravention of the fundamental principles of international law and the Charters of the United Nations and of the Organization of African Unity. This objective has been pursued doggedly in practice in the past year.

2. The Government of Eritrea rejects the blatant violation of its territorial integrity.

3. The Government of Eritrea further rejects and condemns the use of force to resolve this and other similar problems as it believes that the solution lies in negotiations and peaceful means. It is on the basis of this principle that the Government of Eritrea demanded the reversal of the acts committed by the Ethiopian Government last year when it evicted farmers in the Badme area from their villages by burning their cultivated crops. Similarly, the Government of Eritrea rejected the logic of force and repeatedly requested the Ethiopian Government to rescind its acts when its troops forcibly occupied Bada (Adi Murug) and dismantled the administration in the area. When the Ethiopian Government refused to heed these legitimate requests, the Government of Eritrea did not attempt to regain by force the occupied territories. Instead, it opted to seek a peaceful solution through bilateral negotiations and the formation of a Joint Committee.

4. The Cabinet of Ministers noted that the Ethiopian Government has been pursuing a deliberate policy of occupying Eritrean territories through the use of force to create a de facto situation on the ground. As such, it demands the withdrawal of all Ethiopian troops that have crossed the border illegally and who remain inside its territory.

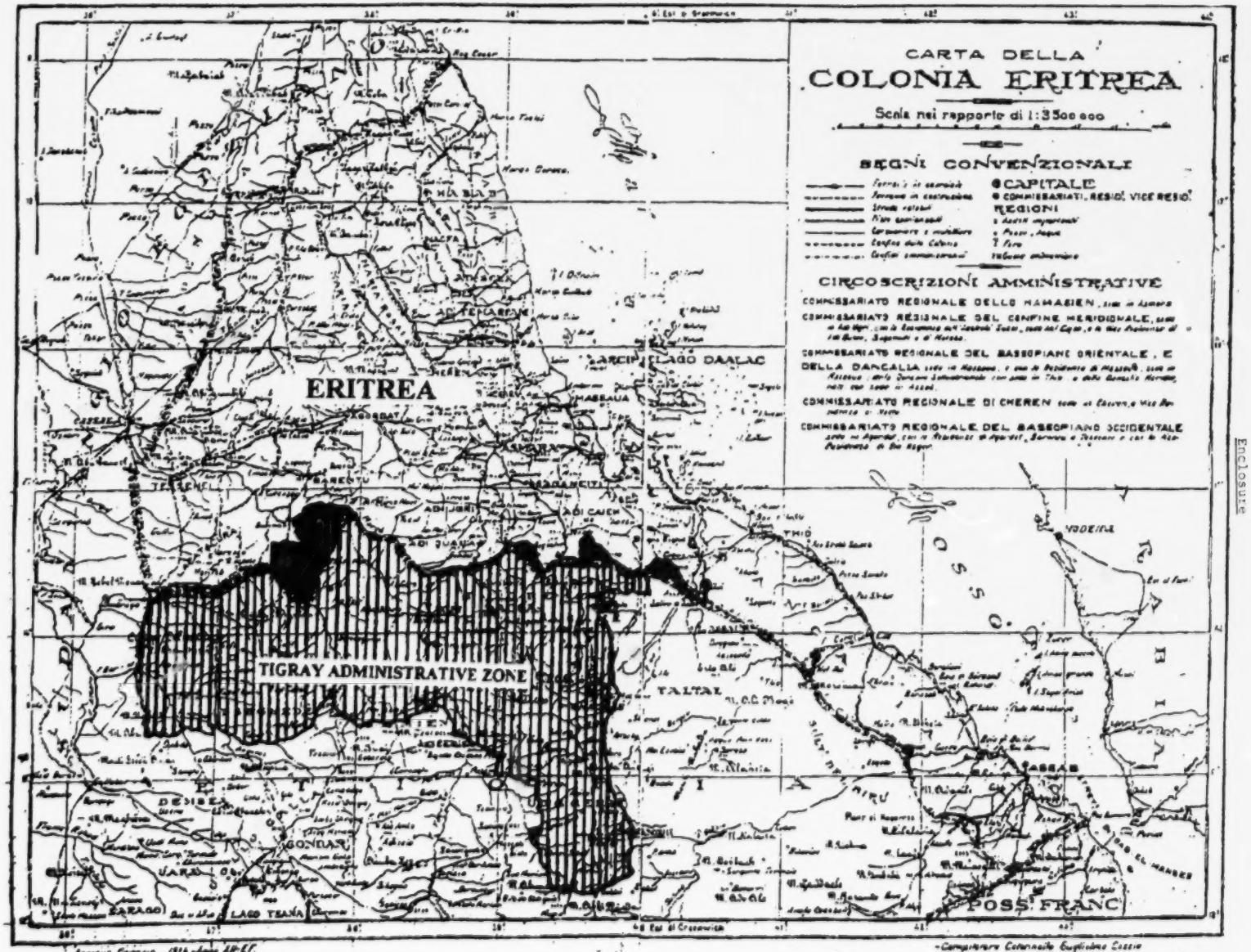
5. The Government of Eritrea categorically asserts that it has not made any incursion into Ethiopian territory and reaffirms its readiness to facilitate inspection by any third party to verify the facts on the ground. Similarly, it calls for an independent investigation to ascertain the circumstances of the incident that occurred on 6 May 1998 and which accentuated the current crisis.

6. The Government of Eritrea again calls upon the Government of Ethiopia to publicly announce to the peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as to the international community, the territories that it claims along the common border. These claims must be accompanied by the requisite documentation, maps and geographical coordinates. It cannot otherwise accept Ethiopia's ambivalent position that argues, at times, that the boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia is not known and delineated while at other times, it repeatedly threatens to declare war on Eritrea unless it withdraws from these territories whose entitlements it is not certain of.

7. The Cabinet of Ministers reiterates its proposal issued on 14 May 1998 for the temporary demilitarization of the areas of tension in order to defuse the present crisis that may entail grave consequences for both sides and until the problem finds a comprehensive and lasting solution.

8. The Cabinet of Ministers commended the initiatives undertaken by several friends and concerned parties to defuse the current crisis between Eritrea and Ethiopia and to facilitate a lasting solution, and reaffirmed its commitment to encourage these efforts without reservation.

9. In conclusion, the Government of Eritrea expresses its dismay at the inflammatory campaigns of inciting hatred and confrontation that are being conducted by the Government of Ethiopia and its mass media. Choosing to refrain from mounting a similar campaign, it calls upon the Ethiopian Government and its mass media to desist from these activities.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Enclosure